BYRON AND THE BERNESQUE SATIRE

BY

ROBERT BERTRAM OGLE

A.B., University of Minnesota, 1935
A.M., University of Chicago, 1947

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH
IN THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF THE
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When Byron settled in Venice, in 1816, he began a new life, and coincident with it his genius was directed into a new and startling channel. Within the first year after his arrival at Venice he had written *Beppo,* and within the second year he had finished the first canto of *Don Juan.* On March 9, 1817, he had sent off to Murray the completed manuscript of his remorseful *Manfred,* lamenting to the publisher that it was "too much in my old style" and adding that it was time to "leave off" such mannerism.

Since Miss Ethel C. Mayne's biography, *Byron,* first appeared some forty years ago, most Byron commentators have had something to say about his transition to what is broadly referred to as "the Italian Style." But there has been no thorough comparative study made, in which the satiric verse Byron wrote in Italy has been placed side by side with that of one or more of the Italians who were his precursors. In this thesis I have endeavored to carry out such a study and to apply a process of definition to this Italian style.

Attention is focussed upon the writings of the 16th century Italian, Francesco Berni, to show how his works are representative of the "Italian Spirit," and to relate his forms, attitudes, and techniques to those employed by Byron in his three Italian satires.

In the first chapter, three reasons for the selection of the rather obscure figure of Francesco Berni for a comparative study are discussed: first, Byron himself once mentioned Berni as his original model, and may have been acquainted with his writing before leaving England; second, Berni's name, not that of Pulci, has been most generally associated with the Italian burlesque satire, called "Bernesque" since his day, when he was glorified as the original of burlesque poets and the greatest of them; and third, Berni's writings have been touched upon with no more than passing comment by Byron students, although they can be of considerable value, I believe,

in clarifying and defining Byron's Italian style.

In the second and third chapters, the backgrounds and beginnings of the Byronic burlesque spirit are examined, upon the hypothesis that what in Byron eventually became an affinity to the Renaissance Italian spirit of the Bernesque satire had germinated in him and made itself known long before *Beppo*. Specifically, the aim of the second chapter is to determine what stimuli existed, in Byron's complex nature and backgrounds, to the expressions of humor, and to relate the strains of levity and facetiousness in his early letters to the patterns of his life and personality. I have attempted to show that Byron early possessed the incentive to express himself in a humorous vein, that such incentive derived from three principal mental and emotional conflicts, in which the poet was involved almost from childhood, and finally that it was primarily when he was freed from the tensions imposed by these conflicts that his comic nature made itself known. The study in Chapter III pursues through his early verse some of the motivating forces of Byron's facetious vein and considers influences which were turning his attention to the language and literature of Italy — the influences exerted by his own reading of Italian literature and of such literary historians as Sismondi and Ginguené, by the circle of literary men in which he mixed, such men as John Hookham Frere, William Stewart Rose, and Samuel Rogers, and by the high interest in Italy and her literature which marked the early 19th century.

In Chapter IV attention is turned from Byron to Francesco Berni, to examine the predominant motivating factors and controlling conditions of his facetious verse and to study the subject matter, techniques, and attitudes of this verse. My analysis is divided roughly into two parts, the first dealing with a body of short poems, some sixty-seven in number, called "Chapters," or "Capitoli," with which the term "Bernesque" originated, and the second considering Berni's *Rifacimento* (literally, "remaking") of Boiardo's romantic narrative poem, the *Orlando Innamorato*. The method in the first part has

been to examine in some detail one long poem, a *capitolo* addressed "to Messer Ieronimo Fracastoro Veronese" and generally considered by Italian scholars as among Berni's best poems and as characteristic of the Bernesque form. On the basis of this examination, I have arrived at broad classifications of those varieties of style and of what I have called "techniques of presentation" which, I believe, are responsible for the Bernesque effect. These classifications I have illustrated by reference to excerpts from Berni's other short poems, and in the second part of my analysis have applied them to the *Rifacimento,* concluding the chapter with a consideration of the attitudes towards life and society reflected in this long poem. In Chapter V the Bernesque elements — the styles, techniques, and attitudes — are traced in the satires which Byron wrote in Italy, in particular *Don Juan,* and are found to be predominant here, as they were found to be in Berni's writing.

In the closing chapter the following conclusions are drawn. First, the essence of the Bernesque satire, as of Byron's, is its total, all-inclusive incongruity. No other literary form is characterized by such an unrestrained employment of heterogeneous elements, by the purposive utilization of incongruous varieties of style, matter, mood, and technical treatment. The serious and tragic appear side by side with the lighthearted and the comic; the beautiful and the ugly are emblazoned forth on the same page, and the expected styles and treatments appropriate to such elements are as often as not in juxtaposition. Second, these incongruous elements are held together and given unity by a pervasive spirit of epicurean skepticism, strongly marked, I believe, in both Berni and Byron — a scepticism stemming from the unstable personalities of the writers themselves and driving them on the one hand to evade the dictates and disciplines of traditional literary genres (despite the assertions of esteem for them made by both men), and on the other stimulating their sensitive and perceptive spirits to scan the realities of life, laughing at this experience or mourning that, now contemplating the im-

mortality of the soul, then branding the contemplation with futility by a sudden, inexplicable, solemn preoccupation with trifles. Third, although the Bernesque form appertains to the genus *satire* and the species *burlesque,* both of these terms must be made flexible to encompass it. As satire, it is only occasionally didactic; its predominant purpose seems most often to be to entertain through the creation of bizarre literary effect. The pretensions to instruction, I think, can be easily overrated, although such instruction can be found. Berni, indeed, denied didactic intent; Byron, perhaps less honest, denied it part of the time, affirmed it the rest. As burlesque, the form of Berni and Byron must be allowed to comprise parody, travesty, mock-heroic, and low-buffoonery. Fourth, both Berni and Byron drew heavily upon their acquaintance with the classical writers, especially the Latin, for illustration, for metaphor, and for what I have called "the intellectual joke." And finally, the satire of *Don Juan* becomes less Bernesque, the comedy less detached, after the interval of more than a year which took place between the fifth and sixth cantos, possibly because the emotional tensions, from which Byron had secured relief after his exile from England, were, as the Marchesa Origo has shown, again accumulating.

VITA

Robert Bertram Ogle was born at Burlington, Vermont, on October 23, 1913, the son of Professor Marbury Bladen and Ione Fleming Ogle. He was graduated from East High School, Columbus, Ohio, in 1930 and entered Ohio State University in the fall of that year. From 1931 to 1933 he resided in Rome, Italy, where he studied at the University of Rome and at the Conservatory of Santa Cecilia. Returning to the United States in the fall of 1933, he continued his undergraduate training at the Universities of Cincinnati and Minnesota, receiving the A.B. degree from the latter institution in 1935. After three years of preparation at the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago, he was awarded the Master of Music degree and accepted a position in the Music Department of the University of Kentucky where he taught until 1942. During World War II he served four years in the U.S. Marine Corps, and upon release from active duty in 1946 he entered the University of Chicago, at which he was awarded the A.M. degree in English in March, 1947. Since 1949 he has been an assistant in English at the University of Illinois while completing work for the doctorate.